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ABSTRACT

The basic activities of marketing are discussed, including gathering information and determining needs, designing a program around the elements of the marketing mix, and managing the marketing program. Following a general discussion, applications of the marketing concepts to a health sciences library are described. The administrator of the health service library is targeted for the marketing effort with examples and illustrations directed toward that individual. It is concluded that marketing can be a useful tool for health science librarians if they plan their program carefully and if the librarian and staff support the marketing concept. Nine references are included. (Author/THC)

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MARKETING THE HEALTH SCIENCES LIBRARY*

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*On March 18, 1985, this paper was presented at the Indiana Health Science Librarians Association Annual Meeting in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

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ABSTRACT

The basic activities of marketing are discussed including gathering information and determining needs, designing a program around the elements of the marketing mix, and managing the marketing program. The health service librarian's administrator is targeted for the marketing effort with examples and illustrations directed toward that individual. The article concludes that Marketing can be a useful tool for health science librarians if they plan their program carefully and if the librarian and staff support the marketing concept.

Marketing News quotes the President of HealthMarket, Inc., J. Daniel Beckham, as saying that "...marketing is no longer a dirty word in healthcare." He estimates that "...60%-70% of the nation's hospitals now have a professional vested with marketing responsibilities." Beckham points to a recent study which "...found that hospital chief executive officers ranked marketing as the second most important function in their organizations [1]. Since hospital managers give marketing such a high priority, health science librarians have a good reason to be interested in the topic.

What is marketing? Can it really be a useful tool for libraries and other similar nonprofit agencies? Philip Kotler, the father of marketing nonprofit institutions [2], defines marketing as "...the analysis, planning implementation, and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with target markets for the purpose of achieving organizational objectives [3]. This definition indicates that marketing involves much more than advertising, publicity, public relations, or selling even though these elements often are part of the marketing process.

The business world began to adopt the marketing concept in the 1950s, following the sales era which started in the 1920s and extended to the 1950s. It was early in the 1970s before librarians began to publish material on the importance of marketing [4]. During the sales era, the function of selling goods and services was emphasized. Whereas, the idea behind the marketing concept stresses determining the needs of the user before producing products or services. Perhaps William M. Pride says it best in his statement that: "According to the marketing concept an

organization should try to satisfy the needs of customers or clients through a coordinated set of activities that at the same time allows the organization to achieve its goals [5].

Gathering Information To Determine Needs

Some of the activities of marketing usually include: gathering and analyzing marketing information; designing a program around the elements of the marketing mix of product, price, place or distribution, and promotion; and managing the marketing program. In this particular instance, let's assume that you wish to target your administrator for your marketing effort. You already may be familiar with the needs of your administrator. If so, you may not need to gather more information about him or her. If you are unsure of his needs you may need to do some marketing research.

You may not feel comfortable with sending your boss a questionnaire to learn of his or her needs, but there are other ways to identify them. One way to locate needs of management is through available sources. What is emphasized as important in the organization's annual report or in other special reports? Note topics of concern in memorandums and group meetings. Do these indicate a need for information or a service which the library can provide?

A second way to determine needs of management is through observation. In what areas does the administrator spend most of his or her time? Does the administrator have any special interests or problems? In what organizations is the administrator active? Is there likely to be a need for information or some service which the library can provide in any of these areas?

The needs of management also may be determined through personal interviews. In addition to formal ones, these may take place informally

in the hallway, at the water fountain, or at other gatherings where contact is made. In personal meetings, or conversations, with the administrator, you may discover previously unknown needs which the library can meet. Be ready to show how the library can help when an opportunity arises.

Recently I had an opportunity to interview a hospital administrator to get his ideas about how he felt the hospital library helped to fulfill the needs of the hospital. He emphasized that the library was an important marketing tool for his hospital, providing essential services to doctors, administrators, and other health personnel. He felt that his hospital had an advantage over others in the area because of good library service. I asked him what other informational or service needs hospital libraries should be filling which they are not filling now, and he thought there was a potential to provide more patient education information. He also stated that his hospital had considered attaching a bibliography of reference on the patient's diagnosed illness to the individual's chart where it could be readily accessible to the doctor. This administrator acknowledged his need for library information in such areas as budgeting and marketing. However, he could think of no particular informational needs which were especially difficuly to locate. His answer to my last question may be due to the good library service he mentioned earlier.

Designing A Marketing Program

When you have discovered the administrator's needs, it is time to design a program around the four elements of the marketing mix which consists of: (1) product; (2) price; (3) place or distribution; and (4) promotion. First, you must determine the product which you have to offer. It may be materials such as books, periodicals, government documents, or annual reports. Or information in the form of statistics, names and addresses,

or brief biographies may be what your boss needs. On the other hand, a service such as an interlibrary loan, an online database search, or a call for information to another agency may be in more demand. It is possible that a combination of these materials and services is what is required. Recently I received a letter from a hospital librarian in New York who had his administrator's name and title printed on the letterhead. Perhaps you may want to consider that technique too as a way of giving your administrator more recognition. Careful determination of your boss' needs will help you identify the best product more specifically.

What about the element of price in the mix? This involves much more than monetary value even though that can be a part of it. The time you spend in providing the materials or services and the time your boss spends in reading the materials or using the service may be the major portion of the price factor. As little time as possible should be spent in providing the materials and services, and they should be presented in a way to require very little time and effort from the administrator.

The place factor involves the efficient and effective distribution of materials and services. You may wish to deliver the material to the manager yourself, or you may decide that office mail will provide adequate service. Whatever avenue of distribution used should be convenient and timely.

The last element of the marketing mix is promotion which involves communicating effectively with your market. The main elements of promotion include: paid advertising, free publicity in the media, sales promotion with coupons or contests, personal selling, and packaging. At first glance, most of these may seem inappropriate, but in reviewing the possible elements available, personal selling appears to be one of the most suitable means of communicating with your administrator. This usually involves contacting

your boss directly through persuasive conversation either in person or by telephone. During the spring of 1981, I surveyed sixteen Indiana and Illinois libraries and found that personal selling was also one of their most preferred means of promotion [6].

A second means of promotion which may be useful is through the use of direct mail. For example, reports, memorandums, or other written communication can be sent to your administrator to alert the individual to the results of a study or the availability of materials, services, or programs. Effective packaging of materials can be another important way of promoting the library through the use of color, size, shape, and design. Consider this possibility when you prepare bibliographies, brochures, or even your annual report.

Managing The Marketing Process

Managing the marketing process requires planning, implementing, evaluating, and controlling the marketing program. Kotler recognizes that: "Most nonprofit organizations operate very rudimentary systems of planning and control," but he observes that over a period of time they tend to "...upgrade their planning systems" [7]. A minimum plan probably should consist of an assessment of opportunities available and a statement of objectives to be accomplished within time periods. A possible objective might be to improve communications between the library and the hospital administrator during the next year.

When the objectives have been determined, the next step is to develop a plan of action to implement the program. This normally involves identifying and coordinating specific tasks which must be completed to accomplish the objectives. One task for improving communication with an administrator could include identifying the person's current areas of interest and routing

selected material to the individual in these areas.

To evaluate the marketing process, the actual performance must be measured against the standard which was set. For example, the librarian can determine if communication has improved with the administrator at the end of the year, or even after a few months. If not, the plan can be controlled by taking any necessary corrective action to adjust to your administrator's needs. Keep in mind that most products, including services, have a life span during which time demand for them increases, levels off, and eventually declines. That phenomenon results in many new and improved products in the marketplace, and you, no doubt, will want to modify, or even change, your products and services too in order to maintain demand for them.

Can marketing be an effective tool to use in a library to accelerate the use of materials and services? It can be if the library administrator and staff support the marketing concept and if they plan their marketing program carefully. Authors of most of the 94 publications on marketing libraries which I annotated for the Spring, 1982, issue of Reference Services Review "...agree that marketing concepts and techniques can be useful for libraries..., but each organization needs to determine the appropriate marketing mix which will fit its own specific needs and objectives" [8].

The hospital administrator and writer, Robin MacStravic, has stated that: "The purpose of marketing is to achieve organizational objectives more effectively and efficiently. As such, there should be no question as to whether it is an appropriate discipline for managers of health care institutions. The only question should be whether it is capable of accomplishing its purpose in the health care environment" [9]. The last statement undoubtedly depends a great deal upon the person doing the marketing, and it should serve as a challenge to those of you who wish to market your library.

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